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anything. So Coming Daylight took her infant to her aunt who was a kind of "spiritualist" (one having a ghost helper). The aunt took the baby in her arms and told Coming Daylight: "You get me a piece of charcoal." The aunt took the charcoal and rubbed it on the baby's neck at the back, bent over as if she were going to bite the infant, drew out (apparently by sucking) a little sliver from the baby's neck, and said: "This is what caused her to have a stiff neck." They said a spirit had shot her, although they did not have the baby outside when this happened to her. You were not supposed to take an infant outside in the dark without covering its head. Actually Coming Daylight's infant was inside the tent during the night and they heard something hit a lodge pole and it seemed to frighten the baby, who continued to cry until the aunt removed the sliver.

[158] Mental abnormality could also be caused by such bad spirits, ghostly or other, whether by "shooting" the victim or getting into him is not known. To keep the bad spirits at bay, a stick, with its tip blackened with "nicotine," was left near a baby whenever the baby had to be left alone. Whenever adults went out in the dark, they picked up and carried a stick, of any kind; it was believed that the spirits were afraid of the sticks and would not come near. Beyond such protective observances there appears to have been no cult proper of these bad spirits in the way of propitiatory prayers or offerings.

Much, though not all sickness was ascribed to a malevolent being called Atsa:. When illness recently took off a mother and child in a family, the people said, "Atsa: has visited so-and-so's family." Atsa: did not himself put sickness-causing objects in his victims' bodies, but he was responsible indirectly for other kinds of illness, that is, he had something to do with them. To him were attributed particularly epidemics, especially smallpox, chicken pox and measles. He was an ugly, hideous being, unkempt, with scaly skin and bushy hair who never washed his face. He was thin and starved-looking and his nails were long. He was thoroughly disliked. No food or pipe was ever offered to him. When serious sickness visited the camp, the Supreme Being was prayed to: "Take Atsa: away. He is causing a lot of trouble." Atsa: was

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CHAPTER VII

CURING PRACTICES

880 A good many Gros Ventres through quest or otherwise acquired doctoring power. To give a better idea of it we shall need to see it against the larger background of native concepts of the cause and cure of illness.

Causes of Illness

753 Some illnesses were ascribed to solely or mainly natural agents or agential causes, others to supernatural ones. The line between the two types of causation is not, however, always clear.

753 Sometimes supernaturally caused ailments followed automat-
784 ically from the breach of taboos, others were inflicted intentionally by non-human or by human agents.

Marrow bones were not supposed to be broken inside a lodge or house, and a person who transgressed this taboo would suffer from sore legs. The penalty of fits, cramps and paralysis from certain actions to or by keepers of the Flat and Feathered Pipes has been previously noted.

753 The chief sender of sickness, particularly of epidemics such as
776 smallpox and measles, was the being, Atsa:. This being appears likewise to have had something to do indirectly with other ailments, but exactly what part he had in causing such ailments could not be cleared up by us. The intrusion of pathogenic objects into the body to cause illness was not attributed to Atsa: personally.

Malevolent spirits,—whether ghostly or other is not clear,—would cause illness by "shooting" people, that is, by projecting some small object into the body of the victim. To the maleficent
753 activity of these spirits was also ascribed mental derangement, at
● 158 least in some cases. One such mentally deranged woman was once seen by Coming Daylight. This woman who was getting along in years became deranged all of a sudden. Coming Daylight, with the consent of the woman's husband, went to her lodge and peered in.

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"The woman had everything, like blankets and dishes and so forth, stuffed in between the poles and covering of the lodge. The woman herself was on the ground, crawling around and making motions with her hands as if she were working at something on the ground." Coming Daylight did not know if or how the woman recovered from her derangement because shortly after camp was moved and the people scattered.

Coming Daylight gave details of another mental case, that of a young man who wandered off from camp, tore off his clothing, cut his hair off short, and came running back fast to camp. The people noticed his wild look, grabbed him, and picketed him. He was "raving mad." Later he used to go into the brush, cut sticks until he had a large bundle, and carry the bundle around with him until his death. Some people were afraid of him, but most were not. Coming Daylight did not recall his ever scaring her or her children. He would ask in a kind of pitiful way for something to eat. He would visit a while and then just rush out of the lodge or house.

Thick gave us details of one case of illness of doubtful origin. The illness had started one night when Thick and an inseparable boyhood friend of his were coming back to camp together. They were walking on a flat together, and heard behind them a sound "like somebody dragging a robe or something stiff." They thought it was a ghost and started to run. After a bit they stopped and looked back but could not see anything. They decided it must be a ghost. So they started walking again, and pretty soon they heard the same sound. Of course they then ran. Thick's friend then had a feeling as if somebody were grabbing the hair up on his head, and looked back and said: "Stop! Here is the fellow who is chasing us."

It was a great big owl dragging its wings. From that time on he got worse, and died soon after in 1889. Thick thought that the scare got that night brought on the illness. The doctors who treated the boy claimed he had been "doped" [bewitched] by someone.

Grave or fatal illness could also be brought on by human beings, usually those with doctor power, through sheer wishing or through other procedures, or even, it seems, by human without supernaturally acquired power through concentrated wishing, as will be explained in detail later.

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757 Thomas Main's grandfather would, from time to time when not feeling well, drink a large quantity of fairly warm water, perhaps two or three quarts, before eating breakfast. He would then go outside, put his finger in his throat, and vomit. This means, instead of a physic, was resorted to as a laxative.

As soon as the first thunder of spring was heard, a person with warts would blow on them and they would come off. This was apparently looked upon as a "rational" treatment, though it was possibly of the magical order.

158 726 755 The following cure, related by Coming Daylight and Singer, was of the natural order, but came about without intentional treatment. A young unmarried man, inseparable friend of Dressed In White, Coming Daylight's husband, had become mentally deranged. He would tear off his clothes and when they would catch him and put clothes on him he would run till he ran into the water. He would run everywhere, and would climb up the sides of lodges to the top. This condition lasted not very long before his cure in battle. Some Gros Ventres, including Dressed In White, Coming Daylight and the young man, while camped at Black Butte (now Havre, Mont.), were attacked by some Assiniboine. With all the noise and shooting, the Gros Ventre horses stampeded. Dressed In White ran with his gun toward the stampeding horses, and, as he did so, saw one of the enemy fall in their midst, try to get up, and fall again. Dressed In White shot at him three times and then his gun would not go off and in his anger at it he smashed it on the ground. At this juncture, the young man came along, and Dressed In White said to him: "Hurry and grab that enemy. He is trying to get on a horse." The young man ran over, grabbed the enemy by the hair on either side of the head, threw him to the ground, and held him there. The Assiniboine had a knife but no gun and was trying to get up, buttocks first. Another Gros Ventre, Cuts The Rope, now ran over and shot the Assiniboine, and all then hit him, counting coup on him. From that time on, the young man was quite cured of his mental derangement, or at least showed no more symptoms of it, but he was shot to death not long after by another Gros Ventre. "By getting an enemy single-handed this young man had become a big chief and could have lots of lovers."[10]

[10] Women admired brave young men. See Flannery, 1953, pp. 190-91.